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SUBJECT: OPTIONS FOR DRL PROGRAMMING SUPPORT TO PROMOTE
WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

REF: ISLAMABAD 13344

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Consultations with Pakistan's Minister of Women's Affairs, as well as women legal scholars and activists from across Pakistan, point to two promising areas for USG assistance in promoting women's human rights in Pakistan. The first is support for public information campaigns to help the government disseminate information on changes in laws affecting women. The second avenue to support women would be through programming that improves their economic status. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Post has conducted a series of meetings with female legal scholars and human rights activists across Pakistan, as well as with the country's dynamic new Minister of Women's Affairs, Sumaira Malik. The recurring messages from these meetings include the following:

-- Pakistan must improve legal protections for and cultural attitudes towards women;

-- Actions that meaningfully address women's human rights will be politically sensitive and risky;

-- A one-size-fits-all approach will not work - the issues vary too greatly from province to province and are deeply steeped in local cultures; and

-- Programs should be designed so as not to personalize the cause or solutions around any single individual or victim.

¶3. (C) All sources discussed the possible backlash that could result from support for programs that address women's issues if the assistance is "Western," stressing that if the USG wishes to be helpful in promoting women's rights, assistance should be delivered through respected local organizations.

¶4. (C) If the Minister of Women's Affairs succeeds in securing amendments to current laws that affect women (reftel), information campaigns will be necessary to spread the word to those who enforce and those who are affected by the laws. For example, as radio and television coverage does not reach all corners of Pakistan, the Minister was enthusiastic about community dramas that could be performed in town and villages throughout the country, presenting serious messages in an entertaining manner, or training Lady Health Workers, who routinely visit rural homes, to disseminate information on these laws.

¶5. (C) Post's contacts also agreed that many of the problems Pakistani women face arise from their economic disempowerment. To address this, our contacts suggested that

the U.S. sponsor programs that provide micro-credit, business and bookkeeping training, and support for development of women-owned medium-enterprises that add value to any number of the country's primary products, including dairy, agriculture or mining produce. The Minister suggested possible partnership with international enterprises that are familiar with import/export standards and gradings.

16. (C) Post recommends that DRL solicit submissions from eligible NGOs that propose creative pro-women public information campaigns and/or economic empowerment programs. Due to the sensitivities underscored to us several times, post strongly urges that all submissions require partnership and on-the-ground implementation through respected Pakistani NGOs.

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